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SERMON,
COMPOSED
FOR THE
LATE GENERAL FAST,

OBSERVED

On the Eighth of March, 1797.

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S E R M O N, &c.

AMOS iii. Part of ver. 6.

— SHALL THERE BE EVIL IN THE CITY,
AND THE LORD HATH NOT DONE IT?

WHOEVER wishes to read the Scriptures with that profit and advantage, which is the end for which they were penned, and handed down to succeeding generations, must regard them as containing a register of the Divine Providence, delivering to us an account of God's dealings with the sons of men from the beginning of the world to the period at which they were closed. And, the grand lesson they were particularly designed to give and inculcate upon our minds, is the continual superintendence of the great Creator over the world which he hath made, as it's Lord and Sovereign, and the impossibility of any thing's

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coming to pass without his knowledge, permission, or direction. The truth of this is proved and illustrated by a continual series of the most striking instances, wherein his interposition is displayed for the protection and encouragement of virtue, and the discouragement and punishment of wickedness; that mankind may have the clearest evidence that they are not left, as they are too apt to flatter themselves, to follow their own evil imaginations, but ever observed by an all-seeing eye, and subject to a strict account for the violation of that rule of duty which has been given them for the regulation of their conduct; whether it be that law of reason originally written on their hearts, or a subsequent revelation of the divine will, for the further illumination of their minds.

This, I say, is the use to be made of the sacred oracles, by those who wish to derive due edification from their perusal; without which they must necessarily be resolved into a mere dead letter, void of all spirit, and consequently, of all benefit to those who have them in their hands; which of course cannot but be fatal in its consequences.

Upon this ground, the prophet, in the passage before us, must be understood as addressing himself to *us*, whom the Apostle styles the *Israel of God*. *Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?* not *moral* evil, as some of our irregular teachers have ignorantly expounded it to their deluded followers; but, the evil of affliction and trouble, sent upon the children of disobedience, for the chastisement of their iniquities. And, indeed, however deep men may be plunged into atheism by their impieties, there have been very few instances, I apprehend, where, in the day of calamity, they have not involuntarily fled for aid to a superior power; feeling too sensibly the insufficiency of their own strength to rest on for their support. Even the most thoughtless are made serious by the prospect of death, and the profanest of mariners, not unfrequently, are driven to their prayers by a storm. And, whence this sudden revolution, but from the conviction of an overruling Providence, which hath life and death at it's disposal, and whose commands both winds and seas obey?

From the foregoing doctrine of God's superintending and all-controuling providence, we naturally are led to infer the folly of withdrawing our dependence from him, and placing it upon second causes. A being who is every where present, and possessed of infinite power, must necessarily see every thing that is done, and even meditated; for the maker of all things cannot be ignorant of *the thoughts and intents of the heart*. He therefore can disconcert the wisest counsels, and defeat the mightiest enterprizes. Whence it is, that the Wise Man tells us, *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*. Armies may be mustered resistless in *human judgment*; but in the sight of God, as impotent and easy to be dissipated as the dust driven by the whirlwind. Even the *heathens* were impressed with the sense of this truth, as may be gathered from numberless passages in their best writers; in which the doctrine is not only taught, but strongly enforced. And whence could they have it, but either from the light of their reason, or from some communications which made their way to them from the word of God? But, what-
ever

ever may be the cause, the effect is certain; which is all that we are concerned to know.

In the relation of the various calamities which befel the children of Israel, and which the Apostle informs us, *were written for our learning*, we are given to understand, that they were all inflicted by the divine appointment, for the punishment of their sins. The sword, the famine, and the pestilence, were not *contingent* evils; but, the commissioned executors of the divine justice. And there was no room left for misinterpreting the cause of their infliction, because they were previously admonished of what they had to expect as the consequence of their impenitence.

But here, perhaps, it may be said, that the case of the Jews, who lived under a theocracy, that is, under the divine government, is singular; and not to be produced as an example from whence we are to draw an inference applicable to the rest of the world. In reply to which objection, let me observe, that these judicial chastisements were not confined to the people of God: the Gentiles

too had their share of them, as may be seen in the many remarkable instances recorded by the inspired writers; such as the visitation of Nineveh, Babylon, Ægypt, Tyre, &c. which were all in their turns called to an account for their corruption, though not kept under the same regular discipline as the Jewish nation. And surely there can be no wonder, that they should experience this earnest of the divine regard to their ways, as the descendants of *Adam*, though not the children of *Abraham*; and therefore subjects of his dominion, though not objects of his covenanted mercy. So that at the same time that God condescended to take up his residence between the Cherubim, in his Temple on Sion, as the *king of Israel*, he was also, as the Psalmist speaks, in the full extent of his sovereignty, *King of all the earth*. Agreeably hereto, the Apostle smartly asks his bigoted countrymen: *Is he a God of the Jews only, is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, says he, of the Gentiles also* *. As the maker of all, he must surely be the God of all; and if so, the *avenger* of all who trample upon the known laws of his government.

* Rom. iii. 29.

Having,

Having, as I hope, established this point of the universality of the Divine Providence over the world, and the exercise of it's judicial authority, I shall proceed to the application of this important doctrine to the occasion for which we are assembled. Let us then resume the Prophet's question: Shall *there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?* A city! Alas, what would the Prophet have said, had he lived in *these* days; when not *cities* only, but *kingdoms* and *empires* are moved, and all Europe convulsed and shaken to it's very centre? What, I say, would the Prophet have said, if he had been a spectator of *this* astonishing scene? The man of the world, who *considers not in his mind the works of the Lord, neither regardeth the operations of his hands**, may impute all these extraordinary events to chance, or a blind fatality, and the agency of second causes; and value himself upon his superior wisdom and sagacity in so doing. But, the servant of God will contemplate them in a very different light; he will discern that calamities, such as these, spring not *from the dust*, are not the product of accident, but the order of the

* Psalm xxviii. 6.

world's dread ruler. He will see in that furious oppressor who is desolating vanquished nations, and washing his footsteps with blood, a minister of wrath executing the vengeance of heaven upon a people, who by their evil deeds have disgraced that *holy name whereby they are called*. He will consider the savage perpetrators of these unparalleled enormities as *raised up for this very purpose*; not as merely actuated by the impulse of their own cruelty and ambition, but as the instruments of him whose *sword*, the Psalmist tells us, the *ungodly are*, and at whose command, we learn from the Prophet, *it goeth through the land* *. The lustre of a great part of the Christian Church, we know, has long been obscured, not to say, *eclipsed*, by the errors which have been introduced into it's faith †; and the whole of it egregiously disfigured by the immoralities which have crept into it's practice. The exhausted patience, therefore, of it's

* Ezekiel xiv. 17.

† It is no wonder, says a very celebrated writer, if Atheism should be so thriving a plant in Italy; nay under, if not *within* the walls of Rome itself; where inquisitive persons do daily see the *jugglings* and *impostures* of Priests in their pretended miracles.

adorable head and governor may be well supposed to have given it up to the judgment which it hath provoked, as well for the vindication of his own honour, as for the recovery of his deluded and revolting people. This is no more than what the justice and holiness of God seem strictly to require, and what the history of the Church shews us to be perfectly agreeable to the divine œconomy. Yet, notwithstanding, it is not uncommon to hear men expressing their wonder that a set of such impious rebels against heaven, as well as subverters of all human government, and the enemies of every kind of virtue, should be suffered to prosper and triumph in their enterprizes. But, in this they do no credit to their judgment; for, did they reason rightly, they would see, that these are the very men calculated for the work. For, who but such unfeeling reprobates, are capable of the enormities by which the divine vengeance is executed? Could the religious, the humane, and the liberal, defile churches, raze altars, flee like tigers on the spoil, and drink the *blood of the slain*? Either then the work must not be done at all, or it must be performed by such instruments as these. And, let me add, if that antichristian power which
hath

hath trodden upon the *necks of kings*, and made itself drunk with the blood of the saints, be now ripe for destruction, what engines could you find more ready to undertake, and better prepared to effect it, than that Leader, and that Army, who are at this time encamped against it? And, how very remarkable is it, that out of the very bosom of this parent of corruption, should start up the avenger of her crimes; apostatizing, as it should seem, on purpose to qualify himself for the business! Oh, as the Apostle exclaims, *how unsearchable are the judgments of God, and his ways past finding out* *! What a field of contemplation opens to the reflecting mind!

But, what is the use we are to make of these most singular occurrences? Are they to be regarded only as contributing to the news of the day, and the gratification of a trifling curiosity; as a subject of amusing narrative, or ingenious speculation? What said our blessed Lord of the melancholy end of the poor wretches crushed by the ruins of the tower of Siloam? *Suppose ye that they were*

* Rom. xi. 33.

sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish *.

It was in fact then a national warning, and an earnest of what the whole kingdom had to expect, if they persisted in that wickedness which had drawn down such a fearful judgment upon the heads of those unhappy persons. Permit me, therefore, my brethren, to recommend the above awful declaration of the *incarnate Deity* to your impartial and serious consideration. Suffer not yourselves to regard the calamities, which have befallen the unfortunate states exposed to the wild incursions of abandoned Gallic infidels, as peculiar to *them*, and to view them at a distance only as unconcerned spectators. Remember it is not interposing seas, nor proud navies riding thereon, which can protect those whom the Almighty shall have marked out for correction. If God set his face against a people, neither their walls, nor their hosts, can screen them from his arm. He who hath all nature at his command, and can *enable one to chase a thousand, or two to put ten thousand to flight* †, can never be at a loss for means to

* Luke xiii. 4.

† Deut. xxxii. 30.

humble

humble those who trample upon his laws, and bid defiance to his power. Their embattled legions a *rumour* shall disperse, or *treachery* shall frustrate their counsels; a *panic* shall seize them, and their own fears shall put them to flight; or, *mistake* and *confusion* shall turn their own sword in upon them. A storm shall arise, and the gallant fleet, shattered and dismantled, shall inglorious seek the port, or dashed upon the rocks be swallowed up by the waves. So shall it happen to the enemies of the Lord, to those whom he shall have given up to the terrors of the justice which they have insulted. And, as he is *no respecter of persons*, but sooner or later, bringeth every impenitent nation into judgment, it becometh *us* not to be *high minded*, but fear, lest we also fall under the *same condemnation*. For, how shall we escape, if we are guilty of the same provocations? On what grounds can we flatter ourselves with the hope of such a privilege? Why are the iniquities of one land to be tolerated more than those of another? Is sin less odious, and less malignant in an island, than on a continent? In Britain, than in France, Germany, or Italy? Why then are *we* not to take warning from those awful acts of discipline by
which

which *they* have been exercised, and which seem so evidently set forth for our observation and instruction?

But, what cause have we for alarm, what need of repentance? Was ever a nation so celebrated for its charities, for its liberality to the distressed, its relief to the sick and disabled, and its compassionate succour to the persecuted stranger? Yes, thanks be to God, we still stand high in the exercise of those noble virtues. And, if the report of our travellers may be relied on, there is a better sense of religion, and a greater purity of manners among us, than in most, if not *all* other parts of the Christian world. But, what then? Does this comparative merit prove that we are what we *ought* to be? May not we be *bad*, though those around us are *worse*? And, although the corruption of the other Christian states be more flagrant, and inveterate, does it follow that ours is not far enough advanced to be ripe for visitation? Does the law excuse one criminal, because his guilt is not of so deep a dye as that of another? Or, if one man's case be desperate, is that a reason why another's distemper should be neglected? And, after all, may it not be an act
of

of mercy to prevent final ruin by a timely severity? Now, if the reasoning in the foregoing questions be solid, and incontrovertible, as I think it must be acknowledged to be, it is clear that no confidence can be built upon that favourite plea, the foundation of which they were designed to open and expose.

Upon such solemn occasions as the present, it would be as unpardonable in a Preacher to conciliate the favour of his hearers by smooth flattering language, as it would in a Physician to prescribe for the palate instead of the disorder of his patient. We are called upon, not without *great* reason, at so critical a time, to consider our ways; to make a careful survey of our manners, that we may see what there is in them which may have drawn up that heavy cloud which hangs with such a lowering aspect over our heads; and, when discovered, to remove it by contrite confession, and an unfeigned repentance. What is it then that may be supposed to have kindled the divine displeasure? We are involved in a burdensome and bloody war, that affords no prospect of a period; we are threatened with an invasion by an insolent, implacable foe that
breathes

breathes nothing. but revenge, slaughter and extermination. At home we are harassed by a Spirit of Faction, restless in it's projects, and desperate in it's measures. We have Public Advocates for regicide revolution, and Sedition hath flown through every corner of the kingdom sounding the trumpet of revolt.

What is it that hath provoked a gracious Providence to let loose this Dæmon of discord upon us, and to *bring these troubles upon our loins*? Troubles of *new* and *unnatural* parentage; not the sole, genuine offspring of disappointed Ambition, impoverished Licentiousness, and eccentric Fanaticism; but of wanton Affluence, and capricious Inconstancy conjoined; nauseating the unvaried continuance even of the *blessings* they enjoy. As the wound must be probed before it can be healed, let us boldly make the needful search, selecting the grand lines which communicate more immediately with the heart of the evil. And, as there confessedly are not two more formidable enemies to the welfare of society than Pride and Luxury, let our first enquiry be into the ascendancy which *they* have attained amongst us. Do then the contributions levied by
them

them embarrass our circumstances, injure our families, and force us to withhold from our *distressed creditors* the satisfaction of their demands? And, are we thereby incapacitated for paying that attention which we owe to the wants of our necessitous brethren, and for the performance of those acts of liberality and benevolence by which we might do so much good in the world? Are the effects of these destructive vices so felt in almost every rank of life, as to be productive of *general* distress, and of attempts to replenish exhausted fortunes, no less fatal to the peace of individuals than the public tranquillity and welfare? And, are they every day *encreasing* in stature and in strength?

Are we chargeable with notorious incontinency, and defilement of the marriage bed? Are snares laid for the unguarded Virgin's honour, and subtle intrigues formed for subverting the fidelity of the Wife?

Is our land defiled with the blood of the slain in resentment of affronts, and *avenging*, instead of *forgiving* injuries; *making thereby*
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the commandment of God of none effect, by the vain pretence of vindicating honour?

Are riches *idolized*, the sacred boundary between right and wrong overleaped to gain them, and the face of the poor ground to fill the deepened coffer with the *unrighteous mammon*?

Is there trading in robbery, and scientific studying of theft? Are there thousands, and tens of thousands who exist upon the fruits of fraud and dishonesty *?

Are Parents and Guardians anxious for the proficiency of children in elegant accomplishments, but indifferent and inattentive to the cultivation of their *religious principles*; or, in the more expressive phrase of the Apostle, *the bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord* †?

* According to the estimate of a very celebrated author, no less than an hundred and fifteen thousand are supported by these means in the metropolis only. See Treatise on the Police, &c.

† Ephes. vi. 4.

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Lastly,

Lastly, Is there any remarkable prevalency of irreligion, infidelity, contempt of sacred things, profanation of the sabbath, and neglect of the divine ordinances? And above all, (as what most nearly concerns our Maker's honour, and the salvation of mankind) is the house of God converted into an *house of merchandize*? And, are *unqualified* and *unworthy* persons admitted to wait at the altar, and feed themselves with the *fat of the sacrifices*, while the enlightened, vigilant, and conscientious, but, *friendless* Pastor, is suffered to lie unnoticed, and struggle *unpitied*, with contempt and poverty? And, may not this mal-administration have entailed on the *whole Order* that loss of esteem and influence, which has probably opened the passage for that torrent of *dissipation*, and *dissoluteness* of manners which have overrun, and nearly overwhelmed, *every* part of the community?

As it is by such interrogatives only that we can get an adequate insight into our situation, it must be with a singular force and propriety that they are brought forward upon such a solemn occasion as the present; and therefore I persuade myself, that no offence will be

be taken at the plainness with which they have been proposed. For, such evils as those above pointed at are enough to weigh down and sink the most flourishing kingdom on earth. And, if they do exist and prevail among *us*, they must either be rooted up by a *sincere* and *heartly* repentance, or reduce us to that misery and ruin, which have been the portion of all those profligate and impenitent states that have run the career of wickedness before us. For, however light men hardened in sin may make of their vices, they will not fail to kindle the indignation of a righteous and holy God. What shall we say then to these things? are we guilty, or are we not? Let Conscience speak; and, as our hearts are open to *the eye of him with whom we have to do*, let us humbly acknowledge and bewail what it will be in vain to attempt to cover and conceal. Truth, I fear, will oblige us to confess that, in all the particulars above specified, our depravity is of no *moderate* size, and that we have *much* to fear, *much* to apprehend, if a strong, timely, and *effectual* check be not given it. There is no observing man who doth not see, and no good man who doth not lament and *tremble* at the growing

corruption of the age; especially, at that *hardness of heart* with which it is accompanied.

Shall we then repent, or shall we brave it out, and go on unrelenting and unreformed, till judgment overtake us? Shall we madly persist to close *our eyes that they may not see, and stop our ears that they may not hear?* suffering ourselves to be driven by our guilty fears to every contemptible retailer of atheistical and infidel sophistry for a *specific* to quiet our troubled spirits, and support us in the prosecution of our sinful pleasures? Shall we tamely submit to this most galling, and *abject* of all slavery, and not manfully resolve to *break* our bonds? Will they who dare to tell us *there is no God*, and that our heavenly religion is nothing but a *cunningly devised fable*, will they, I say, indemnify us against the terrible consequences to which their doctrines may expose us? Will they *prove* that the scripture is not the word of God, and that there is neither any Providence to regard the actions of men in *this* life, nor any *place of torment* prepared for the reception of reprobates in the next?

How

How lost then to all common *sense*, as well as common *prudence*, must we be, if we listen to these infatuated agents of the Prince of Darkness!

Wherefore, to conclude, since repentance is the only thing that can save men from the punishment due to their sins, and, sooner or later, all nations are called to an account for their iniquities, let us wisely consider our ways, *and put away the evil of our doings. Let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may lift us up.* No nation under heaven has had fuller experience of the Divine mercy and goodness than ourselves. Let our praises then, and thanksgivings, testify our gratitude for the blessings we have received; let our filial submission and obedience encourage and entitle us to pray, and hope for further favours. *In the Lord*, let us, with the Psalmist, *put our trust*; and in his protection, *not in our own sword*, or the might of our *own arm*, place the strength of our *confidence*. Let us fear *him*, and we shall have nothing else that we need to fear. Our situation, our natural courage and prowess, our nautical skill and naval strength, together

together with our unrivalled commercial wealth, these advantages, I say, crowned with the Divine blessing, may raise us above the reach of the most formidable enemy that can attack us. If, I say, we will but thus make *God* our friend, be *true to ourselves*, and use with becoming energy the means of defence which the Divine Providence has so graciously put in our power, how may we then laugh at the folly, and despise the boasting insolence of that vain-glorious, atheistical foe, who so maliciously watches for our destruction! And, that this may be our happy case, that the Lord of Hosts may go forth with our fleets and our armies, that he may continue to us that favour and protection, to which we are so recently indebted for one of the most glorious and important victories recorded in naval history; let it be the resolution of every one of us, to *cast away the idols which we have set up in our hearts*, and devote ourselves sincerely and *wholly* to his service; let it be our unalterable determination to fear God, honour the king, and promote the publick welfare; let us shew ourselves men, and Christians, and then we shall not fail to be (what otherwise we never *can* be) *patriots*;
let

let us study to *distinguish* ourselves by being exemplary in our stations, labouring to stop the progress of licentiousness, to crush the heads of Anarchy and Sedition, and to revive a spirit of sobriety, subordination, industry, frugality, loyalty, and reverence for the laws. Let us, above all things, let us cultivate a spirit of charity, and *follow peace with all men*; bidding an eternal adieu to those fatal divisions, and that unbridled animosity which have been so long blindly and unfeelingly tearing our bleeding Country in pieces; and let the generous, the noble, the *only* contest be, who shall approve himself the most active, and most *disinterested* in her service. In obedience to the solemn call given us to *awake out of our sleep*, and consider the things that make for our *temporal* as well as *eternal* peace, let us lay these things *dispassionately* and *seriously* to heart. Let this be the closing day of *folly* and *wickedness*, and the beginning of a life of *wisdom* and *virtue*; throwing off the *old man*, with all his evil and corrupt affections, and *putting on the new man*, created after God in *righteousness* and *holiness*. And, oh! that we may experience the blessedness of such a change, that we may know the happiness of
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having the Lord for the rock of our salvation,
may God of his infinite mercy grant, for the
sake of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord! To
whom, &c.

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F I N I S.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

R E A D E R.

THE following Discourse was not delivered agreeable to the expectation of the writer, an unforeseen obstacle having arisen to prevent the execution of his purpose. But, as the opinion of a judicious friend, to whom it was accidentally shewn, was strongly in favour of it's publication, on account of it's apparent useful tendency, it was without hesitation immediately committed to the press; and on this ground it is now offered to the perusal of those who have a relish for such plain practical performances: hoping they will not think the worse of it, because it is not allowed to tell the *name* of it's author.

A S E R-

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